

Testimony of Senator Edwin Gomes, 23<sup>rd</sup> District, March 2, 2015  
before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut Legislature

Good evening, Honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, Co-Chair Senator Bye and Co-Chair Representative Walker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you this evening about two critical items regarding the biennial Department of Housing budget as proposed by the Governor:

1) The first issue is the removal of all affordable housing PILOT and Tax Abatement grant funds from the state budget. As you know, I have just been re-elected Senator for Connecticut's 23rd District representing Bridgeport and Stratford residents. Within my district are eight (8) affordable housing communities – 7 in Bridgeport and 1 in Stratford - where current PILOT and Tax Abatement grants from the state allow low income residents to pay 30% of their income for their housing. Without these funds, low income residents living in these communities will be getting substantial rent increases per month. In many cases the increases will raise the percentage of their income that they will pay for housing to 40%, 50%, and way beyond their ability to pay. Money that they now use to pay for food and medicine will be going to pay their increased monthly rent payments. Is this really where we want to go as a Legislature?

Here is a list of the communities in my district and the number of families in each community that can expect to see substantial monthly rent increases if affordable housing PILOT and Tax Abatement grant funds are not restored to the state budget by the Legislature this year:

Sycamore Place	285 Maplewood Ave., BPT	120 units
Sea view Gardens	890 Seaview Ave., BPT	16 units
Union Village	Union Ave., BPT	22 units
Cedar Park	151 Cedar Street, BPT	16 units
Marionville	60 Gilmore Ave., BPT	24 units
Washington Heights	115 Washington Blvd., BPT	120 units
Unity Heights	424 Lyon Terrace, BPT	50 units
Meadowview Manor	170 McPadden Drive, Stratford	100 units

Together, the lowest income residents in the above communities will be expected to shoulder rent increases large enough to replace the \$189,259 in state funds that currently pays for their collective municipal tax PILOT and Tax Abatement responsibilities. For example, the 65 lowest income residents (those who pay the minimum base rent) at Meadowview Manor in Stratford can expect a \$69 per month increase in their monthly rent beginning July 1, 2015, unless the affordable housing PILOT and Tax Abatement grant funds are restored in this budget cycle. I hope that you will consider the issue and join me in working to restore these critical funds.

2) The second issue that I want to bring to your attention is the complete elimination of DOH grant funding to the Publicly-assisted Housing Resident Network, PHRN. The \$150,000 appropriation is

for technical assistance work throughout the state with residents living in state public housing communities that will be undergoing revitalization over the next ten years. This cut makes no sense to me. We are investing over \$300 million into the system's revitalization, and yet we are cutting a small \$150,000 per year grant to an organization that works to educate and empower public housing residents about their new rights in the process and how they can help direct the future of their communities. Educated residents can better and more fully participate in the revitalization process which in turn increases their stake in protecting the maintenance and safety of their communities. Strong residents understand that quality affordable housing is not easy to come by in Connecticut. Strong residents assist owners and managers in the preservation of affordable housing. Let's not be penny wise and pound foolish. We must restore the \$150,000 DOH grant to Publicly-assisted Housing Resident Network, PHRN, so that residents living in state public housing communities have the technical assistance resources they need to participate in the revitalization process.

Thank you for your time and attention.